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SUBJECT: BELARUSIAN SWT 2008 VALIDATION STUDY

REF: 08 VILNIUS 0125

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11. (SBU) Summary: According to a recent validation study of 2008 Belarusian Summer Work and Travel (SWT) participants, 15 percent of

students did not depart the United States at the conclusion of the program. This figure equals the percentage of students who did not

return after the 2007 program (reftel). Post found clear trends among the non-return data which point to higher risk of non-return in

certain age groups, second-time SWT participants, universities from outside of Minsk, and a few travel agencies. Post will incorporate

this data into adjudications of 2009 Belarusian SWT applicants. In

2009 2,500 Belarusian students are expected to apply for the SWT program. End Summary.

Fewer Applicants Than 2007

12. (SBU) Since March 2008 when the Government of Belarus mandated the

departure of most American staff at Embassy Minsk, Moscow has accepted Belarusian SWT applicants. In 2008, Moscow consular officers interviewed approximately 1,792 Belarusian students who worked with seven SWT providers in Belarus. Of the 1,792 students interviewed, 1,250 were issued visas, a 70 percent approval rate. For the same program in 2007, Embassy Minsk interviewed 2,450 students and issued 1,335, a 54 percent approval rate. Embassy Moscow attributes the decline in overall 2008 SWT Belarusian participants to the expense of traveling to Moscow for visa processing. Many participants apparently opted out of the program because of the added expense. (Note: This cable does not include the 521 J-1 SWT applicants interviewed in Minsk before the staff reduction took effect. Of the 521 applicants interviewed 169 were issued, a 32 percent approval rate. None of these applicants were included in the validation study. End Note.)

Survey Methodology

13. (U) Working with the Fraud Prevention Units (FPU) in Moscow and Minsk, and Moscow's DHS - CIS Office, all Belarusian SWT applicants

issued visas were checked through the DHS Arrival and Departure Information System (ADIS). Those with confirmed departures were considered to have completed their summer program and were not further examined. Those with no departure records, with pending Adjustment of Status, or who had adjusted to B1 status with

departure  
date before March 1, 2009 were contacted by FPU Minsk, who verified  
the applicant's status in the United States.

14. (SBU) The results showed that 1,062 students (or 85 percent) had  
confirmed departures from the United States. Of the remaining 188  
students, 130 (or 10.4 percent) had no departure records, and the  
remaining 58 (or 4.6 percent) had either adjusted status or had an  
adjustment of status pending with DHS. Of those who had an approved

Adjustment of Status the breakdown is as follows:

9	Extension of J1 status
8	B1
16	F1
3	H2B

Of the 16 students on F-1 status, a SEVIS check revealed that 15 of  
the 16 students fifteen were registered "in status" at their chosen  
academic institution. Of the students called by FPU Minsk in the  
validation study, four were not listed at their reported university  
and may have used fraudulent university documents to facilitate  
their  
travel to the United States.

#### Overstay Demographics

15. (SBU) The non-return rates for male and female students were

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almost equal (14 percent and 15 percent, respectively).

Continuing a long-standing trend, older applicants (and, thus,  
further along in their university education) were more likely not to  
return to Belarus.

Year of Birth	Non-Return Rate (percent)
1982-84	24 (Issued 8 ? Non Return 2)
1985	32 (Issued 29 ? Non Return 9)
1986	23 (Issued 183 ? Non Return 43)
1987	14 (Issued 480 ? Non Return 69)
1988	13 (Issued 427 ? Non Return 56)
1989-90	8 (Issued 124 ? Non Return 10)

16. (SBU) In addition, applicants with prior J-1 visas were  
one-and-a-  
half times more likely not to return than first time SWT applicants.

According to survey results, 27 percent of prior J-1 SWT  
participants  
failed to depart the United States as compared to 12.8 percent for  
first- time participants. Applicants with prior J-1 visas were also  
more likely to legally adjust status than first timers. Applicants  
with prior J-1 visas composed 15 percent of issuances but consisted  
of over one third (34 percent) of all pending / approved Adjustments  
of status.

#### Belarusian SWT Agencies

17. (SBU) In 2008, there were seven SWT agencies that serviced the  
Belarusian market. The following table breaks down non-return  
rates  
by agency for the past two SWT seasons:

Agency	2008 Non Return Rate(percent)	2007 Non Return Rate(percent)
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Discovery	0	Not Active
EVI Group	10	20
Latvian Center	12	11 (DBA IEC in 2009)
Rayet Plus	33	25
Star Travel	13	22
Universe	24	11
YTC	16	14 (DBA IEC in 2007)

(Note: In between the 2007-2008 SWT seasons one agency, International Exchange Center (IEC), changed their name to Youth Travel Center (YTC). A second agency, Latvian Exchange Center (LEC)

seized upon the opportunity and renamed themselves International Exchange Center (IEC) and will use that name in the 2009 season.  
End  
Note.)

#### Belarusian Universities

18. (SBU) In 2008, SWT participants from the more prestigious universities in Minsk (e.g., Belarus State University, Minsk State Linguistic University, and Belarus State Economic University) continued to have a lower non-return rate than universities outside

of the capital. This supports the assumption that students from Minsk feel that they have better economic prospects and are more inclined to return to Belarus at the end of the SWT program than students from other regions of the country.

Selected Universities (percent)	Non Return Rate
Belarus State University (Minsk, Minsk region)	11
Minsk State Linguistic University (Minsk, Minsk region)	15
Belarus State Economic University (Minsk, Minsk region)	15
Gomel State University (Gomel, Gomel region)	23
Mozyr State Pedagogical University (Mozyr, Gomel region)	50
Baranovich State University (Baranovich, Brest region)	67

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Many of the students attending university in Minsk are actually from the regions but through talent and/or connections attend university in the capital.

Comment: Looking Ahead to SWT 2009

19. (SBU) Again in 2009, Embassy Moscow will accept applications from

Belarusian SWT participants. To date we have received 873 applications. We anticipate the total number of applicants for 2009

to be approximately 2,500. Belarusian SWT applicants are particularly challenging to adjudicate because they traditionally have excellent English skills, good grades at university, prior international travel to neighboring EU countries, and parents with professional jobs. In order to refine the adjudication standards of

Belarusian applicants, Post this year requires all applicants to have their year of study in a specific data field in the NIV DS-156 application. Also, Consular officers are making more detailed interview notes mentioning details like applicant's prior international travel and home town. Armed with this data, Post will

be able to further refine the profile of a non-return SWT applicant.

End comment.

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